An Introduction to Wikimedia

Section 1: Finding information on Wikimedia

The purpose of this section is to go through some exercises to locate information on various Wikimedia projects. A number of examples are provided, but feel free to use these techniques to locate other information during the workshop if you would prefer.

Different projects

There is a list of all of the content-related Wikimedia projects at http://www.wikimedia.org. As a brief overview, here is what the projects contain:

- Wiktionary: Dictionary entries
- Wikiquote: Collections of quotations
- Wikibooks: Textbooks and instructional books, also hosts the Wikijunior subproject
- Wikisource: Collections of full text material, such as published books and speeches
- Wikinews: News bulletins
- Wikiversity: Educational materials and learning resources
- Wikispecies: Taxonomical information on plants and animals
- Commons: Pictures, sounds, video, and other media files
- Meta: Internal documentation and coordination for Wikimedia projects
- Incubator: Material concerning proposed and/or retired projects

All of these projects, except for Commons, Meta and Incubator, are also split into different language sites. For instance, there are separate Wikipedia sites for English, German, French, Indonesian, and many other languages. This material will concentrate on the English language projects, but if you have questions about projects in other languages, please ask one of the presenters. Commons is a multilingual project, where many different languages co-exist on the same site.

Finding information on Wikipedia

Due to the sheer number of articles on the English language Wikipedia (over 3½ million, at time of writing), finding information can occasionally be tricky. Luckily, Wikipedia comes with a powerful search feature, which is shown on every page.

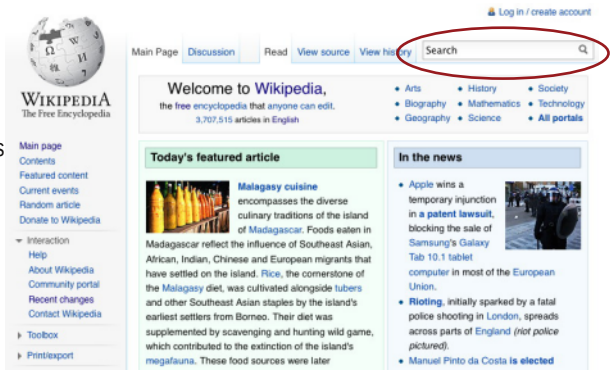

Figure 1: The English Wikipedia's front page, showing the search box on the top right corner.

The most basic search available simply includes typing a search term into this box, and pressing the ENTER key. If an article title exists with the exact same name as the search term you have entered, you will be taken to that article. If an article with the exact title does not exist, a fulltext search will be performed to look for your search term in the body of each article. The results will then be displayed in order of relevance, with the article the software thinks is most likely to match your requirements being displayed at the top of the list.

Sometimes, there can be competition for a single article title. For instance, as you might expect, the article named "John Howard" contains a biography of the former Prime Minister. However, this is not of much use if you are looking for information on John Howard, the actor. In cases like these, a 'disambiguation' page is created to direct the reader to the article that they are looking for. A link to this page is placed at the top of the article.

In this case, when we click on the link to the disambiguation page, we are presented with a list of people named John Howard, including a biography of John Eliot Howard, a British chemist noted for his work in developing quinine, John Howard, an 18th century prison reformer whose article is at "John Howard (prison reformer)", a 28 year old American mixed martial arts fighter with an article at "John Howard (fighter)", and of course, "John Howard (Australian actor)", a biography of the Australian actor.

If you are not sure of the title of the article you want, and entering keywords into the search box is unsuccessful, there are also a number of topic directories available. The most popular of these are at "Category:Main topic classifications", and "Category:Fundamental categories". You can simply type these page titles into the Search box and begin browsing!

Figure 2: The article on John Howard, ex-Prime Minister of Australia. As there are other articles on people of the same name, there is a link to the disambiguation page at the top of the article.

Activity

Locate the following pages on Wikipedia:

- A list of recipients of the "Australian of the Year" award.
- See whether there is any biography of a person with the same name as you on Wikipedia. If there is not, see if there are any people with your last name. If you have a biography of yourself on Wikipedia, congratulations!
- The article on the town of D'Aguilar, in Queensland.
- Starting from "Category:Main topic classifications", locate the category page containing all Australian sportspeople. Hint: Try looking under "People" first.

Challenge: Find a list of all the Australia-related articles that have been assessed as "Featured Content" or "Good Articles".

Finding information on Wiktionary

Wiktionary is organised just like a regular dictionary, with each word serving as the "title" for the entry. For instance, a definition of the word "apple" is located on the page entitled "apple". You can access a particular page title by typing it into the search box in the upper right hand corner of the page.

Where Wiktionary differs from normal dictionaries is that it also has entries for words that are not in English. If you search for the term "fromage", you are taken to a page explaining that the word is in French, and means "cheese".

Activity

Locate the following information on Wiktionary:

- The dictionary definition of the word "library".
- The Irish-language translation of the word "paper", in the sense of "a material to write on".
- The meaning of the Indonesian word "blumkol".

Challenge: A list of all (5 at the time of writing) English language verbs starting with the letter 'x'. Hint: You might want to start at "Category:English parts of speech".

Finding information on Wikisource

On Wikisource, material is organised in different ways depending on the nature of the work. For instance, individual poems, speeches, or other short works might be contained within a single page, whereas novels or larger works might be split over a number of pages, consisting of an index page and a separate page for each article or chapter.

If you know the title of a work, the easiest way to find it is to simply search for that title. As an example, searching for "The Man From Snowy River" will take you straight to the text of the poem. If you know the author but not the title, you can search for the author name, and generally get a list of that author's works. For instance, searching for "Shakespeare" leads to "Author:William Shakespeare", which contains links to all of Shakespeare's plays, poems, and sonnets.

If you do not have a particular work in mind, but need to find information on a certain topic, there are a number of category trees that divide works up by genre, subject, and type. These category trees can be accessed through the "Main categories" section on the project's front page.

Finally, a listing of works is also available based on a modified version of the LOC categorisation scheme, an entry page can be found at "Portal:Index".

Activity

- Find the following resources on Wikisource:
- An illustrated copy of Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland"
- The text of Paul Keating's famous 1992 speech in Redfern.
- Works concerning: Early voyages to Australia, collections of Christmas stories, and a poem about ghosts.

Finding information on Wikiquote

Quotes on Wikisource are grouped together into pages sorted by author, work, and source. For instance, there is a page entitled "Oscar Wilde" for quotes by Wilde, another entitled "1984" for quotations from the novel 1984, and one entitled "Politics" for general quotations on the topic by a variety of authors.

Finding media on Commons

Commons is different to the other Wikimedia projects in that it is inherently multilingual, and the collection of content is mainly intended as an aid for other projects, rather than as an aim unto itself. With that said, it has a useful secondary function as a repository of media that can be used in other projects.

Activity

- Find an image or media relating to the following:
- Dalmatian puppies (Hint: This dog breed might not be spelled 'Dalmatian' in other languages)
- Images donated to Commons by the State Library of Queensland.
- A page listing all the images that have been recognised as "Featured Images" for this month.

Section 2: Contributing to Wikimedia

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to give a quick overview of ways that interested members of the public can contribute to Wikimedia projects. The vast majority of our content has been developed by volunteers and members of the public (just like you!), and the "anyone can edit!" philosophy is one that we take very seriously.

Registering an Account

While it is possible to contribute to Wikimedia anonymously without registering, it is recommended that new users register an account. This provides a number of benefits while editing:

- It groups all of your work together under one banner, making it easier to keep track of what you are interested in.
- It promotes collaboration, by giving you a distinctive and unique identity on the projects.
- Logged in users can set up preferences on the website that govern how pages are displayed, and can attach addons (called 'gadgets') to their account to provide additional functionality.
- If you do not register, all changes will be displayed in your page history credited to your computer's IP address. It is possible in many cases to trace IP addresses down to individual towns, companies, or schools. This information is not displayed for registered users, helping preserve your privacy.

To register an account, click on the "Log in / create account" link in the top-right of the page. On the log in page, click on the "Don't have an account? Create one." link. You will be asked to nominate a user name and a password, as well as provide some other information.

Figure 3: The front page of the English Wikipedia, highlighting the "Log in/create account" option.

Note that Wikimedia has some requirements for user names:

- They should not be offensive, crude, or obscene.
- They should be for one person only; that is, accounts that represent an organisation or group of people are not allowed.
- They should not imply that the user is a famous or noteworthy person (unless they actually are that person.)

Once you have an account, there are a few things that should be highlighted. Upon logging in you will have some new links at thetop of each page: your user name, which links to your personal user page; "My Talk", which links to a page where you can receive messages and respond; "My Preferences", which let's you customise how you interface with Wikipedia through the browser; "My Watchlist", which you use to track changes to articles which you are interested in; "My Contributions", that shows all of your edits since you first started on Wikipedia; and "Log out" for when you wish to stop for a bit (highly recommended when working from public terminals).

Setting Your Preferences

Clicking on the "My Preferences" option mentioned above will bring you to a page where you can change how you view Wikipedia, and provide some additional functionality that can be useful. Your "user profile" will give some basic information about your account - how long you have been editing for, any special permissions you may have, your email account (only viewable by you, but if you set it, other people can send email to you, and you can send email to other people), the ability to change your password and an option to change your signature (used when leaving comments on discussion pages).

Two options may be particularly useful when starting out. The “Date and time” tab will allow you to set the timezone in which you reside, and this will automatically adjust some some information (such as the times that appear on your watchlist) to your local time. And the “Gadgets” tab provides extra features to make editing easier: in particular, “HotCat” is worth enabling, as it streamlines the all-important process of adding categories to pages.

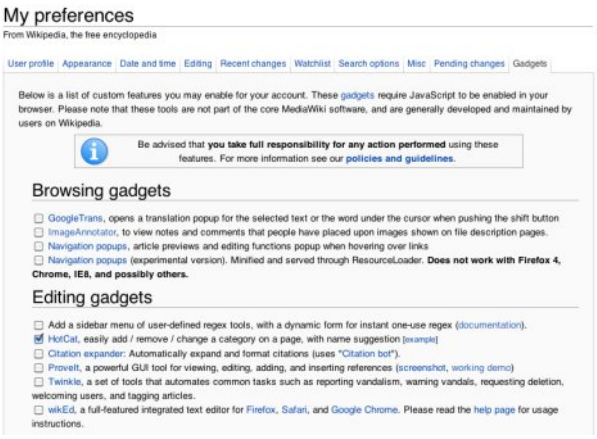

Figure 4: The "Gadgets" tab in the user preferences section.

Creating a User Page

One of the first things you may wish to do is create your own user page. You can add as much or as little information as you wish - generally it is recommended that you do not include personal information, but you might consider adding some general information about yourself. Keep in mind, though, that it is your choice as to how much (or how little) to add.

Just to get started, consider putting some information about the country you are editing from. If you click on your username at the top of the page, you should see a new page with the message “Wikipedia does not have a user page with this exact name”. To make changes, first select “Start the User:..”.

You should now be presented with a form where you can create your user page. Try adding two lines:

```
[[Portal:Australia]]
{{user Australia}}
```

The first provides a link to a page that provides information of interest to Australian contributors, while the second adds a small box stating that you are editing from Australia. You can check your changes at any time by selecting “Show Preview”, and select “Save Page” when ready.

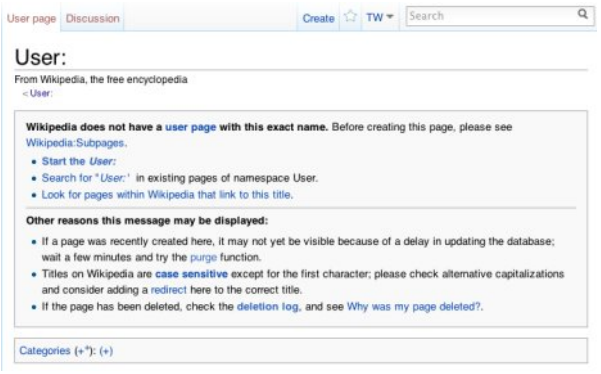

Figure 5: When you visit your user page for the first time, and it hasn't been created yet, this is where you start making changes.

Now that you have a page, you can try adding a category using HotCat. If HotCat has been enabled, at the bottom of your user page should be a small blue link saying “Categories”. To the right of the link should be a “+” sign - clicking on that will open a text box in which you can add your chosen category. To start with, add “Wikipedians in South Australia” to the box, and click save. Once it is there you can select the category and have a look around at some of your fellow South Australian contributors - luck holding, you’ll find some interesting people and gain some good ideas as to how to further develop your user page.

All of the Wikimedia projects run on the same software, and despite some superficial differences, they all have the same basic navigation structure, which appears on the top-right hand corner of the page.

Editing

When first editing on Wikipedia, the best place to start is the Sandbox. The Sandbox can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sandbox. Given that changes to a wiki are immediatly visible, it is a good idea to get some practice before editing the encyclopaedia proper. To get started, click on "Edit" at the top of the page, scroll down to the input box, and make your changes. Selecting "Show Preview" will let you check your changes before you save them, and "Save" records your changes for all to see. And while you're at it, don't forget to explain what changes you made in the Edit Summary, as this will make it easier for people to tell what was done.

A wiki can only accept plain text. Which is good, because when making simple alterations, such as spelling corrections, that is all we need to use. However, a problem emerges when we want to add special formatting – if only plain text can be included, how do we add bold, italics, or headings? The answer is that we use normal characters in special ways.

For example, if you wish to use italics, you add two postrophies " to the beginning of the text, and two more at the end. The wiki will hide the apostrophies from view, and thus "'This is italics" will be displayed as This is italics when shown as part of the article. Similarly, three apostrophes indicates bold text, and five apostrophes (""") indicates text which is both bold and italic.

Headings are handled through the use of the equals sign. Two equals signs, such as ==Heading== will display the text as a major, top-level heading. Three equal signs (===Heading===) will display it as a smaller, second-level heading, while four will make a minor heading. Headings serve a number of different purposes: they make the text easier to read; they allow you to edit just a single subsection rather than the page as a whole; and they are used to produce an automatic Table of Contents.

Other common formatting requests include: indenting text (:); bullet points (indicated with a *); and numbered points, (using a #). Each of these only work when added at the beginning of a line, but they have the advantage of working together: for example, ::: will indent three tabs.

Links are another important part of wikis, and here you have two options: internal links, which link to another page in the wiki, and external links, which link to a different page on the web. For the former, you employ double square brackets. Thus [[Australia]] will link to the article on Australia, and [[Australlia|Terra Australis]] will also link to Australia, but it will display the text "Terra Australis" when doing so. For URLs, you need to employ a single set of square brackets, but you also include a title: [http://wikimedia.org.au/ Wikimedia Australia] will link the words "Wikimedia Australia" to the Wikimedia Australia website.

However, there are some conventions that should be observed when making changes:

- It is considered polite to enter an “Edit summary”. This should be a short summary of the change being made, no more than a sentence, that will appear in the page history.
- Edits can be flagged as “minor edit” by ticking on the checkbox. This feature should be used for changes that are minor, such as

typographical corrections or minor formatting changes. Changes that introduce or remove material should not be flagged in this way. Minor edits will be highlighted with a boldface letter 'm' in the page history.

- Changes should be entered using correct Wikisyntax (see next section). If you are not sure whether you have got the markup right, you can use the "Show preview" button to see what the page will look like after it has been saved.

Images and References

Adding images to an article is a bit tricker. The primary method is to use double square brackets around the file name: [[File:Australia Cairns 01.jpg]] will insert the photo from the front of this pamphlet. However, if you do that, there will be no caption, and the image itself will be the original size – which in this case is far too big for an article. Thus typically more information is included: [[File:Australia Cairns 01.jpg|thumb|right|Mangrove seedling|alt=A single mangrove seedling emerges from the mud]] will add the image, display it as a thumbnail, position it on the right side of the screen, add "Mangrove seedling" as a caption and provide alternative text for people with vision impairments.

It is also worth keeping in mind that Wikipedia requires content to be verifiable, and for this we need to add references. One approach is to use <ref></ref> tags. Anything between the tags will constitute the reference. So to reference this sentence, you add the tags at the end:<ref>"Editing Wikis" (2011) Wikimedia Australia</ref> You may also need to include <references /> at the end of the article, (if it is not there already) to make your references visible.

Activity

In a sandbox, try the following markup:

```
==Example==

This is an example of text ready for a wiki. It has both '''bold''' and "italics", and contains:

# One

# Two

## Three

numbered points – one of which is at the second level.

It also links to the article about the [[Big Orange, South Australia]].
```

Administrators: The Janitors of Wikipedia

Certain users on the project are trusted with special tools that other users are not; these users are known as Administrators. This includes the ability to delete pages, block users from editing for a period of time, and to lock pages so that they cannot be edited. On most projects, these rights are assigned periodically through an electoral process. Administrators are great people to go to if you need help, whether it be with an abusive or uncivil editor, or simply to perform a janitorial task to assist with what you are working on.

On Wikipedia, [[Wikipedia:Administrators' noticeboard]] is the best place to get the attention of an administrator, most other Wikimedia projects have similar pages.

There are also higher levels of access, including bureaucrats, stewards, oversighters, checkusers, and developers, however these tend to give specialised tools that the average user would not require in the course of day-to-day editing.

Activity

In a sandbox, using the code from the previous activity, try adding a photo of the Big Orange. You'll need to find one first, but they should be available on Commons.

Where to Start

So, once you've got the hang of editing, you may be wondering where the best place is to jump in and start. Some of you might already have a project in mind that you'd like to work on, others might want to help out, but just don't know where to start! Luckily, most projects have a "Community Portal" (accessed through the menu on the left hand of the page) where current goings on and tasks that need doing are listed.

Some projects also run regular collaborations. For example, the English language Wikisource runs a "proofread of the month" programme where editors digitise and proofread scans from a particular book, and users of Wikimedia Commons sometimes organise photo expeditions to fill holes in their photographic coverage. If you cannot find a collaboration to suit, then be bold, and propose your own!

If you require any further assistance, please feel free to ask on the Community Noticeboards of whichever project, or contact Wikimedia Australia at contact@wikimedia.org.au for further information.

Banner image: A Tree Dragon or Jacky lizard (Amphibolurus muricatus). Photo by Benjamint444, October 2007. Released under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

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